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### **Review of: The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy: The Canvas of the Mind by Timothy M. Costelloe**

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Timothy M. Costelloe. *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy: The Canvas of the Mind*.

Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2018. Pp. 328. Cloth, £80.00.

The imagination has a central place in Hume's science of human nature: he attributes numerous important features of our mental and social lives to this faculty. However, few studies of his thought have made it their focal topic. *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy* is intended to address "this lack in the literature" (x).

The Preface announces three goals (x): (1) "demonstrate that Hume has a coherent concept of the imagination"; (2) "formulate the principles he consistently cites that give the faculty its motion and distinctive character"; and (3) "demonstrate ... how it finds its way, more or less explicitly, into his treatment of everything into which his philosophical spirit passes." In the service of goals (1) and (2), Chapter 1 gives a general outline of Hume's conception of the imagination. Costelloe argues that the Humean imagination has two main powers—a "mimetic power" to copy previous perceptions, and a "productive power" to fashion new ones—and that it is "a fundamentally hedonistic" faculty (22) that seeks to make easy transitions among ideas so as to "create a union or form a whole" (23) because of the pleasure this brings. Chapter 1 also presents an elaborate typology of Humean "errors," including fictions of the imagination, which informs the following chapters (26–36).

In the service of goals (1) and (3), the remaining chapters try to show how Hume's conception of the imagination informs several core areas of his thought. Chapter 2 concerns "metaphysics," i.e. issues involving ideas of things that "transcend possible experience" (54),

among which Costelloe includes vacuum and time without change, liberty and necessity, “general rules” of the imagination, objective causal power, personal identity, and several aspects of our conception of bodies. Chapter 3 concerns morals and politics, focusing on Hume’s theories of sympathy, property, and political accession. Chapters 4 and 5 concern aesthetics and history, focusing on the imagination’s roles in the production and consumption of poetic or historical works, and in fixing the rules for evaluating them. Chapter 6 concerns philosophy of religion, focusing on religious fictions, and the difference between “true” and “false” religion. Chapter 7 concerns philosophy, focusing on the imagination’s role in the activities of the philosophical “painter” and “anatomist,” and an alleged “antinomy” of “true” and “false” philosophy.

Costelloe says that Hume offers a “complicated and not altogether coherent picture of the imagination” (xi) and that his work contains “apparent inconsistencies” (2). He nonetheless finds a significant degree of unity in Hume’s thought. According to Costelloe, a theory of “fictions” informs Hume’s philosophy throughout: not just his views of space, time, identity, body, and self (as is well known), but also his views of free will, general rules, property, and accession. Costelloe also argues that Hume draws analogous distinctions between “true” and “false” forms of history, religion, and philosophy; that he posits analogous “antinomies” concerning metaphysics, religion, and philosophy; and that his distinction between the philosophical painter and anatomist is analogous to that between the poet and the historian.

Costelloe deserves special praise for the way he incorporates Hume's historical work into this study. As well as dedicating a chapter to history, he incorporates discussion of Hume's views about history into other chapters, relating them to his aesthetics, philosophy of religion, and meta-philosophy. He thereby presents the *History of England* as an integral part of Hume's overall intellectual project.

Throughout, the book focuses on explaining and systematizing Hume's views about the imagination. Costelloe pays little attention to Hume's arguments for these views, or to the alternative views against which Hume sought to defend them. As a result, the book does less than it might have to convey the philosophical significance of Hume's views and why he held them.

Also missing is any sustained discussion of Hume's views about reasoning. This omission is surprising because, as Costelloe notes (3–7), Hume classifies reasoning as an operation of the “imagination,” in the inclusive sense (T 1.3.9.19n/117–18). Costelloe seems to consider this passage misleading as to Hume's considered view (5). Accordingly, the book focuses almost entirely on operations of the imagination other than reasoning.

I found some of what Costelloe says about these operations unconvincing. For example, his claim that the imagination is “hedonistic,” which informs much of the book, seems to face a dilemma. Either (i) Costelloe is attributing teleological explanations to Hume, couched in terms of the imagination's “end” (23), which Hume could not accept, given his rejection of final causes (T 1.3.14.32/171); or (ii) these apparently teleological explanations are to be cashed out by attributing “desires” to the imagination (as Costelloe sometimes seems to intend, e.g. at 23, 147,

205), which conflicts with Hume's refusal to reify faculties (a refusal that Costelloe recognizes and claims to honor).

Nevertheless, *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy* is a novel and thoughtful treatment of a central topic in Hume's thought. It deserves to be read by everyone interested in Hume's conception of the imagination, and Costelloe makes a strong case that this group should include everyone interested in Hume.

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